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For Immediate Release

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PHILADELPHIA MAN CONVICTED OF ADVERTISING
CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Case is first of its kind in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

PHILADELPHIA - Robert Merz, 45, of Philadelphia, was convicted today on all counts in connection with his advertising child pornography on the internet, announced United States Attorney Laurie Magid. Merz was convicted on of advertising child pornography, receiving child pornography, transportation of child pornography and possession of child pornography. It is the first case in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania to charge advertising child pornography.

Merz was the administrator of a child pornography message board on the Internet, entitled "my Kingdom". He placed a notice and advertisement on the board explaining the rules of the forum, the purpose of the forum, and the general content of the pictures of the children to be posted on the forum. That notice and advertisement read, in part, as follows: "This forum is for nudes and non nude pictures, galleries, and videos of children, . . . ages 0-17, both female and males. . . . Whether it is a boy and a girl, or one or the other, we are here for the same reason, we like see the nude body of children". The online group had members from around the world who were handpicked by Merz. The group could only be accessed via a password and was established not only to trade images and videos of minors, but also for members to talk about their common sexual interest in children.

During the three-day trial before U.S. District Judge Juan R. Sanchez, the government presented evidence that Merz' home was searched in February 2007, and computers, DVDs, and CDs were seized. Upon review of the seized materials, investigators discovered hundreds of thousands of images and videos depicting the sexual abuse of minors as young as toddlers. Some of the images depicted violent sexual acts being committed against the victims. Merz used numerous online technologies to receive and transport the images.

A sentencing hearing is scheduled for July 13, 2009. The defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 35 years in prison with a maximum possible sentence of life imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$250,000.

The identification of this online group resulted from Operation "Joint Hammer," the U.S. component of "Operation Koala," an ongoing global operation targeting transnational rings of child pornographers that was initiated by Europol and Eurojust, and involved 28 countries.

The case was investigated by the FBI and the United States Postal Inspection Service. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Roberta Benjamin and Kevin Brenner and Trial Attorney Steve Grocki of the Department of Justice Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit <http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov/>.

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